

# THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

*pro bono humani generis*

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UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR-emeritus

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DAVID B. RUDERMAN

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Dear Prof. Ruderman

I wanted to express my appreciation for the labor and erudition you have applied to "Jewish thought and scientific discovery in early modern Europe." It led me to think twice about the shallow generalizations I expressed in one of my memoirs, which I enclose but just to point out one paragraph. The complexity of that issue is daunting; what is psychologically relevant is perhaps what I believed. Your book showed me a continuity of Jewish interest in learning and teaching science of which I had not been aware.

I don't know what I should say about reconciliation of my father's orthodoxy with my own secular scientism, and how far there was a fruitful cross-fertilization in my own career. How the Judaic traditions about enquiry were transmitted to me is an interesting question. My father did go to Yeshiva (in Eretz Israel as well as in Manhattan), but his education ended by the time he was 21, and how much would he have read about the scientific traditions? He did have a reputation of being an exceptionally astute scholar. I was pretty firmly committed to my ways by the time I was 8 (and he 30).

Of course! I should have quizzed him, but was not wise enough to do that before it was too late -- he had a severe stroke in his early 50's.

My own diagnosis now is that the preeminence of and Jewish pride in figures like Weizmann and Einstein overrode any theological considerations in paternal-filial discourse. It's not that father was hostile to science, nor worried it would undermine religion. More that he might have preferred I follow a rabbinical career, or at least maintained the rituals.

But my own quest is not bereft of a search for order and meaning.

Anyhow your book tells me there have always been contradictory strands in Jewish philosophy, and it's no simple task to disentangle them. As to tolerance of skepticism, I'm not aware that any Jewish heretic was ever burned at the stake. [Ouch!! am I forgetting the

New Testament's claims - let's not get into that]

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg